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Mortensen, Mette; Lomborg, Stine

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The Mobile Archive of the Self: On the Interplay Between Aesthetic and Metric Modes of Communication

METTE MORTENSEN¹

STINE LOMBORG

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

This feature article develops the concept of the mobile archive of the self to account for the communicative codification of self by way of metrics and aesthetics in the use of smartphone apps. We propose that research on digital self-representations would benefit from a more systematic and conceptually grounded integration of the metric and aesthetic modes of communication in what we term “mobile selfhood”—that is, current practices for tracking and documenting the self with the smartphone. Positing that the two modes of communication are increasingly inseparable, we use selfies as a case in point to offer an integrating analysis that focuses on processes of historicizing, commercializing, and politicizing the self via smartphone applications. The resulting mobile archive of the self is at once bound to the hardware and software we use to perform and historicize it, and reconfigured, merged, and reassembled as user profiles enter into data flows that run steadily from our personal devices to commercial and political actors.

Keywords: mobile archive of the self, mobile selfhood, aesthetics, metrics, selfies, self-tracking

Over the past decade, smartphone applications have emerged for registering, organizing, and sharing everyday life as it unfolds. These applications bring about extensive data through which individuals generate autobiographical insight (places visited, events attended, people seen, food eaten, kilometers run) in what Rettberg (2017) terms “cumulative self-representations” (p. 35). Aesthetic and numeric data intersect in these cumulative self-representations, as exemplified through practices such as selfies and self-tracking for documenting the self via smartphone applications. Aggregated data produced over time are presented in structured categories according to automated sorting on the smartphone as a performance of personal history, which is both communicated to and constructed by the user. The abundance of data on individual media users is not merely a result of the proliferation of smartphones. In many parts of the world, a smartphone belongs to and is carried around by a specific individual, thereby generating a data trail that can be uniquely tied to the owner. For the user proper, the smartphone is a vehicle for “moving” the self—temporally and spatially—and for documenting and sharing these movements.

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We propose the concept of the mobile archive of the self to delineate the ways in which data about the self are created by smartphone users to autobiographically fix and contextualize the self, but which are also shared with actors in pursuit of control or commercial gain through the data-based profiling of individuals. The mobile archive of the self combines and develops disparate historical traditions for registering the self, carried out both by the self and by others. These include personal archives such as journals and photo albums (e.g., Humphreys, 2018), and public archives used for purposes of control and surveillance (e.g., Sekula, 1986; Tagg, 1988). Moreover, the mobile archive of the self has expanded these traditions for registering the self, in time through the immediacy of accelerated digital communicative flows, and in space by the mass accumulation of visual data and various metadata. With this conceptual intervention, we aim to inform research on identity construction in digital media, and we do so by focusing on selfies.

In this feature, we conceptualize the mobile archive of the self as formed by an interplay between metric and aesthetic modes of communication. The overarching notion of communication enables us to see numeric and visual data not as distinct objects of analysis but as different and yet intertwining forms of expression in mobile selfhood. Furthering recent yet scattered integrating efforts, we propose an analysis of metric and aesthetic modes of communicative expression that focuses on processes of historicizing, commercializing, and politicizing the self in and through this mobile archive. This is important, we contend, because any communication of the self in digital media involves various configurations of metrics and aesthetics. If we only pay attention to the aesthetic dimension of self (re)presentations within the mobile archive of the self, we overlook the ways in which metric data generated by contemporary practices for documenting and sharing the self become part of the narrative construction of mobile selfhood in space and time. On the other hand, if we only concentrate on metrics, we miss vital parts of the social and cultural functions involved in communicating about oneself to oneself and to others, which, arguably, are significant to explaining the willingness to feed data into commercial and political systems. Hence, this feature article offers an intervention in current scholarship that still seems unhelpfully siloed.

Research on current practices for tracking and documenting the self with the smartphone has mostly paid attention to either the metric or the aesthetic dimensions of what we might term "mobile selfhood." However, general theorizations of digital media touch on the interplay between these dimensions (e.g., Gillespie, 2010; Zuboff, 2019). Moreover, recent contributions, especially in the self-tracking literature, have sought to provide more thorough accounts for the intertwining of aesthetic representations and metric data. This body of literature has studied the experienced pleasures of practicing mobile selfhood (Kennedy & Hill, 2018), particularly in debates about the so-called quantified self (Sharon & Zandbergen, 2017), and has contributed to broader discussions about the datafication of health (Ruckenstein & Schüll, 2017). The attempts at integrating analysis have yet to be consolidated and deepened outside of these domains, and we argue that studies of leisurely media use and selfhood per se have a lot to gain from integrating aesthetics- and metrics-focused analyses of communication with the system, the self, and the social world. Following this lead, we are going to demonstrate that the two are increasingly inseparable by sensitizing selfie research to the metric-aesthetic interplay. Even though selfies are usually understood as a visual *mise-en-scène* of the self, they are also highly metricized. Users deliver metric metadata when posting selfies on social media. Selfies are also ordered according to metadata for the individual user on her personal smartphone and rendered an important asset in commercial exploitation and political uses of personal data (e.g., through facial recognition algorithms).

The gap between metrics and aesthetics in current research is, at least in part, explicable by differences in scholarly traditions and approaches. Although the metric dimension has mostly preoccupied researchers from communication, science and technology studies (STS), and critical data studies, directing their attention to data-driven life, the aesthetic dimension has mainly been studied by scholars from media studies and related fields, interested in digital media enabling new forms of self-expression. Accordingly, our conceptual intervention also makes the case that interdisciplinary research is required to study the myriad implications of current practices for communicating the self through digital media.

Proceeding in four sections, this feature article first reviews scholarly literature on self-tracking and selfies to illustrate the unhelpful divide between metrics and aesthetics. Next, we combine insights from these perspectives to propose an integrating analysis through three levels of the mobile archive of the self. The first concerns the way the smartphone advances specific ways of historicizing the self, which are leveraged for the easy sharing and circulation of the self through dedicated apps, including social media apps. These principles form entry points for understanding the data-driven commercial and political ramifications of the mobile archive of the self, which constitute, respectively, the second and third levels of analysis. As this is mainly a conceptual intervention, we do not, as such, engage in analysis, but use selfies throughout as illustrative example of the intricate interplay between metrics and aesthetics. We conclude by synthesizing our conceptual framework for the mobile archive of the self and by pointing to its further research directions and implications.

Research Into the Metrics and Aesthetics of Mobile Selfhood

The coupling of metrics and aesthetics in theorizing and analyzing contemporary practices of documenting and archiving the self invariably calls for interdisciplinary approaches. As already mentioned, the metric dimension and, by extension, questions about datafication, have mostly gained attention from the social-science field of critical data studies and some strands of STS. Aesthetics, by contrast, has primarily been dealt with by researchers from media studies and cultural studies. Bridging these scholarly traditions, we propose an integrated framework for the mobile archive of the self.

Self-documentation via (personal) media, and not least the smartphone, is often understood as more or less blunt mirroring and staging of the self. Yet research suggests that both self-tracking and selfies imply more complex practices and purposes. If we first turn to scholarship on self-tracking, which is commonly seen as the willful and purposeful logging of oneself through digital media in regard to, for example, exercise, calorie consumption or sleep (Neff & Nafus, 2016). Although research has addressed modes and outcomes of self-monitoring at work (Moore, 2018; Till, 2014) and among people living with chronic conditions (e.g., Weiner & Will, 2018), self-tracking is often, especially in popular communication, regarded as a project of day-to-day self-optimization, based on logging bodily and mental cues to become healthier, fitter, and happier. This focus on self-optimization with data stems from the Quantified Self movement (Wolf, 2010), which has received much scholarly attention (e.g., Lupton, 2016). While it designates the self as an ongoing project, optimization has been documented to be only one motivation, and sometimes a marginal one, for self-tracking (Didžiokaitė, Saukko, & Greiffenhagen, 2018). Focusing on optimization blinds us to the basic pleasures that may be derived from the very act of tracking and registering oneself.

Self-tracking is typically framed and marketed through the logic of numbers, which is seen to create, if not objective then at least more accurate, systematic knowledge of the self than that produced by sensations and memory (Wolf, 2010). While scholarship has contested the idea of objectivity through quantification, the way self-tracking practices and technologies are framed in current research is largely inspired by both hopeful and critical accounts of big data and metrics as key forces in regulating individuals and society (Beer, 2015; Lupton, 2016). Alongside this mainstream of critical analysis, recent empirical studies contend that playful engagement with oneself can be gleaned from studying the aesthetic encounter between the user and the self as represented in numerical data (e.g., Kristensen & Ruckenstein, 2018; Lomborg, Thylstrup & Schwartz, 2018; Nafus & Sherman, 2014; Sharon & Zandbergen, 2017). Aggregated data on self-tracking services provide feedback to the user, typically through visual displays of basic statistics, progress made, and future plans (Lomborg & Frandsen, 2016). This communication may be considered a "data selfie," which represents the individual through input both concerning and created by her- or himself. Data visualizations evoke affective responses, which are key to understanding processes of sensemaking in relation to metric data, as Kennedy and Hill (2018) have shown. Thus, "data selfies" present opportunities for affective and aesthetic experiences of oneself, and are imbued with meaning through the intricate relationship between perceivably objective data and subjective perceptions of and tinkering with the represented self (Neff & Nafus, 2016; Ruckenstein, 2017; Sharon & Zandbergen, 2017; for a thorough review of the preoccupations with what has been dubbed "datafied power" and "living with data" approaches, see Ruckenstein & Schüll, 2017).

Scholarship on selfies is also proliferating. This literature typically devotes attention to either the context or content of these digital self-portraits as social practices and cultural artifacts (see also Senft & Baym, 2015). Selfies have been studied in relation to, for example, political participation, activism, and "selfie citizenship" (Kuntsman, 2017b); participatory journalism (Koliska & Roberts, 2015); feminism (Olszanowski, 2014); queer storytelling (Vivienne & Burgess, 2013); identity formation of young adults (Barker & Rodriguez, 2019); and sexualized "self-shooting" (Tiidenberg, 2014). The other strand of literature addresses selfies as a visual genre for performatively expressing and enacting the self (e.g., Hess, 2015; Lobinger & Brantner, 2015). Selfies are self-referential and performative; they depict the individual taking the photograph in the very act of taking the photograph. They communicate an "intimate act" of "a self, enacting itself" (Frosh, 2015, p. 1621), but they also work as "strategic management of the self" (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016, p. 254). Along these lines, selfies are often thought of as narcissistic (for a critique of this, see Warfield, Cambre & Abidin, 2016), but might also be considered social, playful, and exploratory (e.g., Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016).

By contrast, not much attention has been paid to the accumulation of images or indeed "big images" (Hankey & Tuszynski, 2017, p. 170) over time. Selfies function as self-tracking because they contribute to writing a story of the self on the go through metadata accounting for when and where these photographs have been recorded. The metric aspect of selfies is constituted not only through metadata, however, but also through the (possibly changing) aesthetics as manifest in the photos over time and by responses from other users in the form of likes and comments. Accordingly, as Frosh (2015) contends, "representational criteria alone are insufficient" (p. 1608) to understand selfies. They are also the outcome of "innovations in distribution, storage, and metadata that are not directly concerned with the production or aesthetic design

of images" (Frosh, 2015, p. 1607). This is part and parcel of the "algorithmic turn" (Ulricchio, 2011) in digital photography.

Moving beyond selfies and self-tracking, Humphreys' (2018) book *The Qualified Self* presents a media and communication studies attempt at integrating numeric and aesthetic lenses by way of the concept of "media accounting" to analyze and explain practices of selfhood across the history of mediated communication. Her fine-grained analyses draw attention to the similarities between current mobile communications and historical precedents, such as personal diaries in the 18th century. According to Humphreys, accounting is expressed both through aesthetic and numeric representations, in the present moment and in the aggregate history of the self told over time. For Humphreys, accounting is thus a communicative practice intertwined with both mediation and datafication. Yet Humphreys' conceptual framework of practices prioritizes media content—users' communicative expressions through the technological affordances of a medium—over media systemic and political-economic logics of datafication.

Although acknowledging the importance of historical precedents, we would like to emphasize the equal need to understand the profound transformation in mediated selfhood conditioned by the advent of digital media. What is different, historically speaking, is the politicization and commodification of users enabled by datafication, and the scope of uncertainty as to who might witness or possibly take advantage of one's mediated practices of selfhood. This, we contend, is contingent on the affordances and organizing principles of the media themselves. For instance, smartphones offer options of instantaneous "selfing," the immediate production and dissemination of data about the self. This marks a decided qualitative and quantitative historical change about the speed, amount, and modes of communication. We propose that integrating metrics and aesthetics in analysis rather than privileging one over the other provides a more nuanced understanding of mediated selfhood, which renders the individual visible in various ways and to various actors. Conceptually speaking, metrics and aesthetics are simply different yet also interconnected modes of communication. Together, they contribute to historicizing, sharing, and governing the self. We explore these dimensions in the analytical sections below to unpack key disciplinary intersections and questions for metric-aesthetic analyses of the mobile archive of the self.

Historicizing the Self

Even though digital media are often associated with immediate and ephemeral communication, they have instigated and accelerated "a general storage mania" (Røssaak, 2010, p. 14), which hinges especially on the self in what Beer and Burrows (2013) call "archives of the everyday" (p. 54). Selfies offer instant possibilities for constructing, serially organizing, and making sense of personal narratives according to place, time, relations, events, tags, and so on. These factual categories are typically generated and labeled as metadata, and are often automatically inferred in each instance of documentation. As mobile media record the here-and-now presence or performance of the self in space and time, these representations accumulate and form an open-ended archive. This temporally sensitive, evolving archive invites the user to look back and trace how the self has developed. It not only chronicles how appearances, relations, activities, and places have changed over time but also turns into a testimony to life lived and time passed.

While metrics foreground factual measurements and perceivably objective information, aesthetics offer a sensuous and seemingly more subjective self-documentation. Both dimensions, however, situate the self in time and over time. The self is always already historicized owing to the synchronous options of representing and archiving the self that are afforded by smartphone apps. Thus, the selfie contains a “unified space of production and depiction” (Frosh, 2015, p. 1612), showing the individual taking the photo in the act of taking the photo. This is similar to other forms of self-tracking, which also combine the representing/represented self with the fixation of time and place (e.g., the tracking of a run representing the person running in the act of tracking the run). When the single moment is registered through aesthetic and numeric expressions of the self, it becomes horizontally flattened by the paratactic ordering of the archive, which arises, as Derrida (1995) contends, “at the place of originary and structural breakdown of said memory” (p. 14).

Selfies contribute to the mobile archive by providing autobiographical insight into day-to-day experiences and appearances along with the option to optimize and stage the self. Tensions run through this archive between the automated and the manual, strategic and spontaneous, performative and accidental. Selfies and other forms of self-tracking (e.g., of calorie intake, menstrual cycle), require the user’s manual operation of the smartphone, whereas designated self-tracking apps such as Strava record activities automatically on activation. In addition, the user has to decide whether to keep or reject storage of certain data points, be they images or self-measurements, deemed compromising or irrelevant.

Smartphone apps for communicating mobile selfhood provide customized solutions for overviewing the cumulative data input as well as for singling out various histories. For instance, different narrative paths are offered by photo apps to organize selfies according to time, place, events, and people. Selfies are automatically grouped together as a genre by the default settings of iPhones and other smartphones. Such groupings present different ways of communicative ordering enabled by metric metadata. For example, selfies showing the same person are grouped together through facial recognition algorithms. This is similar to how other self-tracking applications order users’ data input into relatively neat categories, specifying, for instance, the place and time a certain mood, food intake, or exercise was documented. Apps such as LifeSum, Strava, and Clue use these data to calculate more advanced metrics, such as the pace of a run and the visualization of developments over time. Like photo apps for selfies, these apps use archived data to automatically document and reflect the self in a historical perspective. Furthermore, the historicized self is typically communicated back to the user through visual aesthetics (graphs, tracking activities mapped onto a calendar, colored diagrams indicating mood swings, warnings about unhealthy patterns of calorie intake, etc.), enabling both playful, pleasurable, and possibly disappointing or shameful encounters with oneself (Kennedy & Hill, 2018; Lomborg & Frandsen, 2016; Ruckenstein & Shüll, 2017).

This systematization of the mobile archive of the self ensures that the order is continuously remade and restructured as new data accumulate. Different constructions of history are established in interplays between aesthetics and metrics, as shaped by the communicative affordances of the smartphone and algorithmically underpinned apps/social media sites. Archival practices are likely mostly experienced by users as everyday ways of interacting with smartphone apps and social media requiring little effort. Nonetheless, archives set up and maintain hierarchies of information. Datafication processes have furthermore facilitated commercial and political uses of the mobile archive of the self, thus coupling it to

questions of money, power, and knowledge. Through digital media, the self emerges as a historical and social entity, a commodity, a biometric entry point.

Sharing and Commercializing the Self

In historizing the self through the smartphone, users also perform the self in front of intended and unintended audiences as well as imagined and even unimagined ones. Although sharing selfies and other forms of communication about the self through apps and services typically fulfills social functions for users, the aesthetic and numeric data also communicate with and within the systems in which they become embedded. They feed into and are used commercially by social media companies, and beyond. Features for sharing the self are typically built into the applications we use to document ourselves (John, 2016). As a communicative practice, selfies are closely intertwined with the development of visual social media, notably Instagram, on which these self-images find their premier outlets and become visible to larger audiences.

Data generated by practices of self-recording through the smartphone typically linger between private and public domains. When circulated on social media, they are interlinked with the stories of others and work as phatic communication to establish and maintain sociability through commenting, likes, and tagging (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016; Lomborg, 2014). Through their aesthetics and metadata, selfies are at once instances of communicating with oneself and of communicating with others using smartphone camera apps and social media. Some photo applications include core social media functionalities, such as connecting with peers and liking and commenting on tracking episodes. These functionalities invite users to share their data and turn selfie practices into interest-based communities for runners, diabetes patients, or beer enthusiasts, established and marked, for example, through hashtags on Instagram. Sharing self-documentation and the associated socializing with others via smartphone apps is prompted both through the aesthetics and the metrics on display. The composition, motif, and filters of selfies may evoke resonance and response from others, as may their metric information, for instance, by the viewers' recognition of when or where a photo was taken. In this way, audiences engage with the metrics and the aesthetics of the circulated self as inseparable dimensions of mobile selfhood.

Sharing goes beyond the user's will and control as numeric and visual data enter commercial domains. Even if the user chooses to keep selfhood practices within the private confines of the embedded photo or self-tracking application and stores these data on the smartphone and in the personal cloud, they are still shared and come to have a life on their own, as they constitute the crucial asset of the market they become part of. For one, the data are used to enhance the service or platform in question, which is a typical justification for the collection and analysis of user data in digital media. This may be seen in the development of new features, redesign of the interface, or in the minimal tweaking of the algorithms that sort data and serve feedback over time.

Moreover, datafied selves derived from individual user profiles are aggregated, decomposed, combined anew, and repurposed as they move through connective commercial infrastructures. In this process, they lose their contextual meaning and attachment to the individual who produced them in the first place—to the extent that they become someone else's document or representation. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that in today's digital society, "we are data" (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). The datafied self

becomes the object of algorithmic filtering and personalization to curate content, products, and so on to the specific user. It may be merged with other datafied selves and enter into big data streams for audience segmentation and predictive analytics. This dynamic, in turn, raises ethical questions about the judgements and decisions made on the basis of these data. Scholarly literature on algorithmic personalization is rife with users feeling misrecognized by the advertisements served to them on social media (e.g., Ruckenstein & Granroth, 2019). Intertwining processes of personal sharing and commercial circulation of lively data in this manner flow from and through the mobile archive of the self in ways that are mostly obscure to the user and unassociated with the everyday practice of taking and sharing selfies.

Governing the Self

Metric and aesthetic data generated by mobile selfhood practices can serve political means of social sorting, control, and surveillance, as they fix unique bodies to particular data sets through which locations and movements are traceable (see also Rettberg, 2017, p. 91). Through these data, bodies are identified and coupled to personal information, such as name, age, gender, nationality, and possibly also criminal records and other registered files. They are rendered visible and recognizable beyond the control of the user and his or her likely intentions for the everyday tracking and registering of the self in selfies and other self-representations. Representations of the self are both affective entities (linked to the person's individuality and biography) and abstractions (coordinate data systems; Mortensen, forthcoming). They linger between the individual's interests in seeing his or her identity and history reflected, and political interests in keeping track of and storing information about citizens.

Selfies as a practice performed by the self and for the self may at first glance seem contrary to externally imposed systems of control. Nevertheless, selfies play a part in "the rise of biometric governance, and in particular the use of facial recognition in surveillance and policing of individuals and communities" (Kuntsman, 2017a, p. 15). Rettberg (2017) similarly argues that selfies render faces "machine-readable" (p. 93) as biometric training data to be used for surveillance and identification technologies. Data selfies likewise feed into surveillance and monitoring, as evidenced in research literature criticizing neoliberal ideologies of self-optimization (Lupton, 2016), employee exploitation, and citizen scoring based on self-tracking metrics (Ajana, 2017; Moore, 2018; Till, 2014).

Echoing a long tradition of audience and user studies, Barassi (2017) observes that analysis of the use of apps cannot be separated from analysis of the political economy and institutional governance to which they contribute. Issues raised by political dimensions of the mobile archive of the self resonate with the question posed by scholarship on selfies and self-tracking concerning if, how, and when these practices are empowering or disempowering. This is typically understood as whether individuals obtain a sense of recognition through the posting of and feedback on self-images (see, e.g., Abidin, 2016; Tiidenberg, 2014), or what kinds of values, ethics, and agencies are enacted through the technological infrastructures themselves (Sharon, 2017). However, the political implications go beyond this binary understanding of power as a question of empowerment or disempowerment of the self, and we would certainly not be the first to claim that selfhood practices in mobile media may at the same time generate agentic pleasures and subjectivation through technological interpellations (Lupton, 2016; Neff & Nafus, 2016). Personal, self-generated data—in visual and numeric forms—travel through networked communication. They feed into

constructions of citizenship in national and transnational systems of surveillance and political governance, which, in turn, play a part in how states manage security politics and individual rights (Ajana, 2013; Cohen, 2018). For instance, contemporary advances in the study of datafication and data justice helpfully unpack and critique the political and normative underpinnings of digital technologies of the self, in which users inescapably become participants in fulfilling ideologies of pervasive surveillance capitalism by both commercial and state actors (Zuboff, 2019), which again are not normally associated with selfies.

The Mobile Archive of the Self

As we have argued throughout this feature article, the mobile archive of the self may be conceptualized as both the individual's personal assembly of self-representations and their associated metadata, and the more free-floating data-self collected and constructed by others in pursuit of commercial or political goals. In this section, we bring together and deepen insights from the three analytical levels to encapsulate our conceptualization of the mobile archive of the self.

In the mobile archive, the interplay between metric and aesthetic modes of communication contributes to the rich and intensified documenting of the self, which is primarily enabled by contemporary digital media, and their underlying organizing principles and forms of expression and circulation. The resulting mobile archive of the self is bound to the hardware and software we use to perform and historicize it. At the same time, this archive is reconfigured, merged, and reassembled as user profiles enter into data flows that run steadily from our personal devices to service providers, data brokers, governments, and other stakeholders. This perspective is not only central to scholarship on mobile selfhood but also important to understanding the real-life implications of current smartphone use. To name but one example, selfies are often believed to render the subject vulnerable because of the intimacy and privacy of the images (e.g., Miguel, 2016), but typically only the social and cultural aspects of this precarity are addressed rather than the latent and manifest commercial and political ramifications.

We developed our conceptual take on mobile selfhood, first, through casting metrics and aesthetics as interlacing communicative modes, and, second, through tracing the selfie from its inception and integration in a personal, app-based smartphone photo archive to its role as "data points" in aggregate training data for new systems for business and governance. This may be exemplified by the iPhone photo app, in which selfies enter albums—that is, series of images taken, for instance, on this particular date one year ago. Moreover, they are algorithmically grouped together by subheadings such as "quality time," "portraits," or "in nature," ordering the totality of data. The app also automatically categorizes what is referred to as moments, such as "visits to museums," "beaches," "sport events," and "concerts," or categories bound to places, such as "beaches" and "woods." These options provide the user with different ways of organizing selfies. The user may choose to structure according to social relations in albums containing images of the user together with friends or family members, which will represent how these relationships unfold over time. Alternatively, the user may opt for geolocations as an ordering principle, or combine time and place—for instance, to create holiday recollections through selfies. Moreover, user interventions in the form of feedback and choices made to the options provided by the smartphone—for example, by favoring certain images or motifs—optimize and personalize albums, thus potentially enhancing the user's pleasure and gratification in this dynamic archive of the self.

But this is not the full story. The ordering and aesthetic principles fleshed out in the app and personal archive accompany selfies as they flow through commercial and political domains in ways that are difficult for the user to phantom. Thus, the mobile archive of the self is distinguished by private, commercial, and political interests merging and constructing the intertwined identity of the self as private individual, consumer, and citizen. From the perspective of the individual, this may seem like an abstraction insofar as he or she does not have access to the ordering, integration, data enrichment, and sorting principles applied in commercial or government databases, nor insight into the ways in which his or her data are construed and used. However, the mobile archive of the self holds real-life commercial and political consequences. Collected data are not only used/targeted in relation to the individual, but also deployed to develop new systems or improve existing ones, and to register, compare with, and target others. In this way, the mobile archive of the self is, in principle, endless and without finite boundaries between the personal, the commercial, and the political. In this article, we have used selfies as an example. However, further complicating layers are of course added to the analysis because these images are combined with other information about the self. This may be obtained through apps and services that carry an extensive array of behavioral information about the user, even though they are not explicitly dedicated to self-tracking and other self-representational communication.

It is fairly straightforward to explore the mobile archive of the self as comprising metric and aesthetic modes of communication at the personal level, using content analysis as well as data-driven methods from the humanities and social sciences to analyze communicative content and networks. However, it is difficult to integrate these perspectives in research practices addressing commercial and political contexts, into which the mobile archive of the self extends. Questions of access to databases pose one particular obstacle, but there are also ethical challenges to navigating these contexts, understanding the infrastructural and systemic logics at play, and making their built-in choices and principles available for analytical scrutiny. Interdisciplinary teams comprising scholars from computer and data sciences, organizations and business, and humanities and social sciences seem more aptly suited for the empirical challenge of unpacking the mobile archive of the self than any of these siloed disciplines alone.

Conclusion

In this feature article, we have pursued a conceptual intervention in the current scholarship of mobile technologies for constructing, practicing, and expressing the self. Cross-pollinating insights from normally dispersed research on selfies and self-tracking, we contend, sensitizes us to how the mobile archive of the self is constituted in and through the interplay between aesthetic and metric modes of communication. We have argued that metrics and aesthetics intersect in the historical trajectories of the self, created through both instantaneous and sustained user engagement with smartphone apps. Accordingly, we propose that the resulting mobile archive of the self is mobile in two ways: It is a personal companion carried by each of us on the smartphone, and a free-floating data-self, assembled and dissolved again by others in pursuit of commercial, political, or unknown goals.

We have pointed to three integrative analytical dimensions to analyze the metric-aesthetic interplay in the mobile archive of the self. First, the historicizing of the self. This pertains primarily to the user's own communication on the smartphone and addresses the organizing principles of apps (i.e., how the self-

documentation is ordered according to predefined categories which, in turn, allow the user to look back and trace changes in the represented self over time). The second dimension concerns the sharing and commercialization of the self, as app-based self-documentation becomes part of broader networks, thereby entering both intended (e.g., sociable) and unintended (e.g., commercially exploitative) communication circuits. Finally, the third dimension is the political governance of the self, addressing questions of power as they become manifest through the relationship between, on the one hand, affordances of the mobile archive and political infrastructures and, on the other, societal control measures.

For selfie research specifically, our example suggests that it is high time to unpack more systematically the role of communication and metadata in the process of linking individual selfhood practices to broader commercial and political structures. Had we pursued self-tracking as another example of the mobile archive of the self, other questions would have emerged, concerning, for instance, the role of visualization aesthetics in explaining the social and cultural significance of these apps. Future interdisciplinary research may build on the conceptual and analytical integration between metric and aesthetic forms of communication. An important objective in this regard would be to provide empirical substantiation and develop more multifaceted explorations of contemporary practices of mobile selfhood that condition the mobile archive of the self. These practices are contingent on database and algorithmic logics built into the apps that cater to our ongoing self-documentation through various affordances and ordering principles. Such inherently interdisciplinary research would consider, on par, the mediation and datafication of our daily life and communication and, in turn, invite reflections on the ways in which the daily pursuits of users, organized and documented via personal media, enter into commercial infrastructures and political governance.

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